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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that explored assumptions regarding the role of women in higher education set forth in the Sydney Morning Herald (Australia) in June 1995 by Dame Leonie Kramer, a prominent academic. She contended that "women go a bit limp when things get tough...." The study was based on semistructured interviews with seven women in senior management positions in Australian universities. The interviewees were asked what factors had been important in achieving their present positions; how important mentoring had been; what they perceived the relationship between gender and power to be; whether their gender had been an issue in achievement; if they had experienced personalized criticism; and whether management style was an issue. Overall, there was agreement that academic qualifications were important in reaching senior positions. However, once senior rank had been achieved, these qualifications were less relevant. Demonstrated managerial skills were also seen as necessary. None of the respondents had followed a traditional career path; family and domestic conditions had influenced career decisions. Mentoring was seen as very important, but little relationship was perceived between gender and power. The paper concludes that while "management has a masculine flavor," evidence from the interviews suggests that some women are nevertheless able to pursue and practice other forms of leadership. They have found creative ways to play out agendas in environments which are uncomfortable and constraining. Moreover, all the women interviewed exhibited a very clear sense of purpose and were resolute in their determination to bring about changes in their institution through clearly articulated policies and directions. (Contains 35 references.) (CH)

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RECIPES FOR AVOIDING LIMPNESS: AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

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WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Preamble

Dame Professor Leonie Kramer is probably Australia's most prominent female academic. Once Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University and Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, she is presently Chancellor of Sydney University - the oldest in Australia. Not noted for her commitment to principles of equal employment opportunity, she surpassed herself with her pronouncements reported on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Garcia, L.M. 23.6.1995). She contended that *women go a bit limp when things get tough...there are women in Universities...who, when they do not get promoted, start talking about dark, unseen forces that pull them back every time, for which there is just no evidence.* To these assertions she added that *women disadvantage themselves by talking too much and actually trading on their femininity.* She rejected any notion that women experienced discrimination in universities preferring to argue that women were not promoted because they were less qualified and often not interested in an academic career.

As one might predict there was considerable reaction to these pronouncements. An example of this reaction is seen in a letter, published in *The Australian* (July 5th 1995) by a group of Australia's most senior women academics. It begins:

> *It is regrettable that Dame Leonie Kramer, currently a university chancellor and once an academic, should feel it appropriate to blame women entirely for their current poor representation at higher levels in universities.*
>
> *Dame Leonie's reported comments in the press recently (HES, June 28) are lamentable, reflecting as they do dated prejudices and ill-informed views about women in contemporary higher education.*

And the concluding paragraphs:

> *As the chancellor of Australia's oldest university, Dame Leonie has the opportunity to be a powerful and positive role model and mentor to women in the nation's higher education institutions. Instead, the statements attributed to her have demeaned women staff and diminished their contribution at all levels of the university system, and have communicated a discouraging and inaccurate message to women students who aspire to an academic career.*

> *We can only hope that she has been misquoted and that she will shortly set the record straight.*

She wasn't and she hasn't!

This paper is an attempt to explore some of the assumptions underlying Professor Kramer's comments through an analysis of the experiences of a number of women holding senior management positions in Australian universities.

Towards Theoretical Framings

Findings in Australia (Gale & Lindemann, 1989: 2-6; Allen, 1990; Bacchi, 1993: 36-41; Randell, 1994: 1-39), the United Kingdom and the United States (Becher, 1989: 124-5) demonstrate that women continue to be marginalised in academic institutions. These studies suggest that the accumulated patterns of historical privilege and the disadvantages of gender regimes; social and religious attitudes to femininity; women's acceptance and internalisation of their 'natural' positions, together with the masculinist culture of institutions, begin to explain some of the reasons for women's unequal access to, and participation in, the world of academe. Women are more likely to be appointed at lower levels, given promotion and tenure more slowly (if at all), receive lower salaries and are more often in part-time than full-time positions. Women on the whole, are less productive in research and publication, and in the United States in particular, women are given heavier teaching responsibilities which, of course, leads to fewer opportunities for research and publication. The marginalisation is even more stark in the senior administrative structures of Australian universities: 2 of the 37 Vice-Chancellors are women; even in areas where one might expect there to be more women, this is not the case: of the 35 Deans of Education, only 3 are women. In fact, manifestations of patriarchal hegemony are still all pervasive (Blackmore, 1992a & 1992b).

Blackmore (1992a) examines the implications for women in higher education of the directions set by the federal government through its policy statement of 1989 entitled *Higher Education: A Policy Statement*. The paper espoused the principle of equity largely through its advocacy of the position that women could contribute to national economic productivity. Women were perceived as a new source of productive labour: whereas once they served the national economic interest through reproduction, they are now to be seen as a *wasted human resource to be tapped in the creation of Australia's productive culture* (Blackmore, 1992a: 66).

As far as higher education is concerned, this has meant the increasing recruitment of women as teachers (at a time when a career in academe has lost some of its prestige) but not an increasing access to the more prestigious and powerful positions (only 3% of all women academics are professors.) So despite explicit espousal of equity principles, the restructuring towards corporate management models has consolidated power in the hands of the few. In other words, more power is bestowed on the already powerful because the policy initiatives have failed to recognise how equity principles are *subverted, ignored, transformed and selectively implemented* (Blackmore, 1992a: 67) and by the narrow definition of equity in policy statements; that is, equating equity with numerical representation often depicted as the result of women's mistaken educational and career choices. Of course, emphasis on numerical representation ignores less tangible organisational dynamics like hierarchies of knowledge in institutions largely determining the meaning of participation and success (see also Gore, 1992: 192-209).

The research of Gale (now the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia) and Lindemann demonstrates that whilst Equal Employment Opportunity processes and procedures have helped more women to gain initial appointments to universities, it has not had the same success in the promotion of women: *Appointment procedures seem to be moving more towards equal opportunity than are promotion procedures* (Gale & Lindemann, 1989: 3). Further, there are significant differences between the achievements of various universities suggesting the enactment of the legislative requirements are, in fact, differentially applied (Gale & Lindemann, 1989: 3).

The complexity of the argument about the success of women in academe and their representation and participation in management positions where they might be influential in changing attitudes and practices, is entirely absent from Kramer's comments. So too is the recognition that it is necessary to go

> *beyond removing overt structural and procedural forms of discrimination which are at present largely addressed in Equal Opportunity policy and extending our activity into the more blurred and ambiguous areas of cultural valuing and practices embedded in the very structures and values of our educational institutions* (Blackmore, 1992a: 69).

That the categories of *male* and *female* are almost always set in binary oppositions and marked as *superior* and *inferior* and the implications such constructions have for

both relations between men and women and their place in academe, are further silences in Kramer's selective assertions.

Blackmore also explores the implications for women of the move in Australian universities, largely the result of *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (1989), towards corporate managerialism. Essentially, her argument is that such an approach to the governance, organisation and management of universities and its consequent emphasis on function, hierarchy, structural efficiencies and measurable outcomes, increases the power of those at the top to control, monitor, evaluate and define the relative value of members' contributions to the institution.

> *Managerialism has a very masculinist flavour. Its tenets might have been designed to illustrate the classic syndrome of dominant stereotypically masculine features. It is about structure, order, forceful activity, rationality. It is about hardware. It is about technique. It does not emphasise values or how this climate affects the people who are the subject groups* (Bryson [1986] in Blackmore, 1992a: 74).

Blackmore further argues that corporate managerialism *'co-opts' the language of social justice and equity* ensuring that most documentation enshrines references to equal opportunity principles, including gender equity.

In the end though, the co-option is for improving management rather than for improving opportunities and practices for women (after Yeatman [1990] in Blackmore, 1992a: 80).

Blackmore's study of seven women administrators/managers in a state education bureaucracy is illuminating (Blackmore, 1992b). There she draws on the theoretical work of Connell and his notion of hegemonic masculinities (1987), on Yeatman on femocracts and the bureaucracy (1990), on other theories exploring the nature of the state and individual's relationships with it and the sexuality of organisations. The study is reported in an unpublished paper entitled: *'Post masculinist institutional politics:' Hegemonic masculinities bureaucratic culture(s) and feminist practise in educational organisations* and raises fundamental issues about the tensions, the disturbances to personal equilibrium, the conflicts and challenges of working in a bureaucracy as a woman intent on change and upholding principles of equity and social justice. The ambivalences and ambiguities of the female manager are embedded in theoretical positions and discourses that not only provide newer discourses for understanding but, more importantly, for informing strategies of renewal and change. These strategies will be discussed in this paper's conclusions.

Consider Ramsay, the Pro Vice-Chancellor - Equity and the University of South Australia when she writes:

> *I have closely observed and experienced a range of behaviour by men in senior management towards women, myself and others. The effect of this behaviour is to trivialise, minimise or silence altogether women's contribution to policy debates to appropriate and profit from women's ideas, without any acknowledgement of their origin; to actively exclude women from critical meetings and discussions, to the point of suspicions of conspiracy; to render women invisible and inaudible when they manage to attend by ignoring them altogether; and to make women's very presence in certain key contexts a difficulty, a problem, and in such a way that it becomes women's problem to try to minimise the discomfort, to try to contain our difference so that we may hope to 'fit in' to pass without notice. And very much like sexual harassment, all of this occurs in such a way that any reaction at all by women to this behaviour makes the problem of our presence and of our containment worse by heightening their (men's) discomfort, by emphasising our differences, by signalling that we are 'not coping', and that therefore, the whole problem arises from women's inadequacy in the context of senior management rather than men's behaviour towards us* (Ramsay, 1993: 11).

The focus of her argument is that women are struggling to find the language and the discourse to represent their experiences in senior management. Until the personal anecdotes are transformed into phrases instantiated in generalisations, the experiences will remain invalidated. It is the experience transformed into discourse that legitimates the experience. She argues that women's understanding of sexual harassment went through a similar process: personal anecdotes became definitions, albeit *clumsy* and *self-conscious*, and gradually as the meanings settled into acceptable generalisations and were embedded in theoretical discourses that legitimated the anecdote, sexual harassment became an understood experience to be disrupted and challenged and unpathologising of women's experiences. Women in senior management positions have begun to transform their anecdotes and encapsulate their experience through terms like *professional discreditation, intellectual co-option...., professional betrayal....., masculinist exclusion....., conversational colonisation* (Ramsay, 1993: 13). She concludes:

> *The process of reclaiming women's experiences, and in so doing asserting the right to name and describe these experiences from the reality of our lives is fundamental to the struggle for equality* (Ramsay, 1993: 13).

A number of theoretical frameworks are used to explain the position of oppressed groups in society. Althusser, for example, working within a neo-marxist framework argues that structures, informed by ideologies, construct the individual. Through *the 'Logos' meaning in ideology, 'we live', move and have our being* (Althusser, 1970: 54). His structuralist framework suggests that:

> *ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or transforms the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called 'interpellation' or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'* (Althusser, 1970: 55).

This explanation of our interpellation as cultural subject limits the possibility of individual agency and its potential for interruption and change. The relationship between ideology and social practice is presented as causal: *individuals 'mistakingly' take themselves to be the author of the 'ideologies' through which various apparatuses take them over* (Davies, 1993: 13-14).

Poststructuralist theorists, on the other hand, shift the focus to terms like *subjectification* and *discourse* in their attempt to help us understand the processes by which we take on complex and often contradictory subjectivities. When Fairclough describes discourse as *...a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning* (Fairclough, 1992: 63), he alerts us to the way representations of our culture circulate and constitute behaviour, rituals and taboos but importantly in turn are constituted by those behaviours, ritual and taboos. The concept of subjectification seeks to underline the shifting inter-relatedness between representations in language constituting the individual and being constituted by the individual. In other words, discourse constitutes the process of subjectification and is constituted by that same process.

And now finally to the work of Connell, most particularly in *Masculinities* (1995). In his finely grained research, and in his drawing on the discourses of psychology, history, mythopoetry, sociology and cultural studies, he explores the ambiguities and the ambivalences of our attempts to find settlements explaining the varied

manifestations of males' oppositional behaviours towards women and discourses which challenge the hegemonic position they have traditionally occupied.

Why do women in senior management positions experience so much hostility from males in their institutions? Why is it that some males feel so threatened and challenged by them? The women we interviewed offered a range of explanations and the two Vice-Chancellors expressed amazement at the reaction where their gender was the focus of aggression, bitterness and indeed hatred.

Connell offers some insights into the possible reason for these male reactions. Fundamentally he argues that they are part of an historical movement whereby *ideologists of patriarchy struggle(d) to control and direct the reproduction of masculinity* (Connell, 1995: 195) sustained by the view of the *natural* division between men and women and the marginalisation of masculinities other than what he terms *hegemonic heterosexuality*. Such a gender order underpins and systematises power relations in society whereby one set is marked as right and proper by a dominant group. Women's attempts to share the power of the dominant gender order are often met with full resistance...

> *....there is an active defence of hegemonic masculinity and the position of economic, ideological and sexual dominance held by heterosexual men. This defence takes a variety of forms and it often has to yield ground or change tactics. But it has formidable resources, and in recent decades, in the face of historic challenges, has been impressively successful.*
>
> *The successful maintenance of a competitive and dominance-oriented masculinity, in the central institutions of the world order, makes...these trends more dangerous and more difficult to reverse* (Connell, 1995: 216).

But particularly given the conclusions of this paper, some of the dominance has been reversed in the best interests of socially just practices.

Themes from the Interviews

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule (Attachment A) with seven women in senior management positions in Australian universities. Because there are so few women in such positions, and because of the sensitivity of the issues they raised, it was even more necessary to protect their privacy and their

anonymity....however difficult that has proved to be. (For example, as we have previously stated, only 2 of the 37 Vice-Chancellors are women. Both are part of this study.) But, the analysis that follows picks up the essential themes of the interviews and ensuing discussions with these women. Interviews were conducted with two Vice-Chancellors, two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, one Pro Vice-Chancellor, one Dean and one Head of School. Inevitably, in our attempts to respect the women's honesty, some of the richness of the data has been lain aside. Two women in senior management positions declined to be interviewed. We record this because their reasons are instructive - one indicated that she simply could not spare the time and asked that we note this as a feature of being a woman in a senior management position where there are ever increasing demands placed on one's time. The other, having reviewed the interview schedule, also felt that she did not have time to do justice to the complexity of the issues upon which we sought information.

Factors in Achieving Present Position

Academic qualifications, particularly a Ph.D., a significant research and publication profile, success in winning competitive research grants were seen as necessary in obtaining senior positions:

> *The Ph.D. was extremely important because it allowed me to focus my attention on projects, to publish, at the same time, to establish a professional reputation, a scholarly reputation, in the university. So I got promotion, tenure, and my Ph.D.. It was quite late - that I started my academic career.*

Interestingly though, once senior management positions were arrived at, these qualifications and attainments were considered less important and less relevant.

Demonstrated managerial skills, particularly in positions outside universities, were seen as important in achieving senior management positions:.

> *I have also been a senior public servant. I think that was very helpful in terms of learning principles of management, also in terms of exposure to the commonwealth.*

Irrespective of previous experience

> *there are things about being a chief executive that you don't learn until you are one.*

None of the women had come to her position through an unbroken career path traditionally associated with those of men. All had obviously worked very hard to achieve their current position.

> *I mean I am a really very hard worker, have very good health, have a great deal of enthusiasm and drive, and I think vision and a capacity to take initiative, and I think also contrary to what Leonie said about women, I am tenacious and I don't go all limp when it gets rough....* (referring to Kramer's assertion).

* * * * * * * *

> *I just had to achieve more and women usually have to do that to make up for the male networks that they simply don't have.*

All said their careers were largely unplanned and two said serendipity played a role.

> *I don't know that I actually have ever had a planned career. I suppose my career has been serendipitous.*

* * * * * * * *

> *I had never planned a career.*

* * * * * * * *

> *Women don't have career plans, by and large. Mind you, I am not convinced men do either. But women certainly don't.*

Family and domestic considerations had influenced their career decisions and all saw career moves as an intersection of personal and professional factors.

> *So a lot of things have come together and opportunities coming at the right time, and there is one other thing I ought to mention since this is about senior women. I think it would have been terribly difficult to have got where I am, during the decades in which I have got there, and to have performed in various roles the way I have, particularly the long hours, etc., had I had children.*

And no spouse or a supportive spouse seemed necessary.

> *Had I had a spouse who made an issue out of it I could not have moved. We commuted for five years.*

All felt that marriage, and particularly children, restricted women's mobility more than that of men, especially in the early stages of their careers and that women were expected, and more prepared to move to enhance their partner's career.

> *I wasn't mobile because I had a family, I didn't take opportunities to go overseas even to do my Ph.D. I did not have the mobility and that is normally quite a handicap...One has to make up for it and in competitive terms, I had published more, I had bigger grants.*

* * * * * * * * *

> *...this whole question of mobility is a very serious one. It is something still which is relatively rare I think, that it is the woman who moves or makes the move then the husband or the partner might come.*

All identified the significance of mentors and support mechanisms as essential to their career development, factors which will be discussed later in the paper.

Mentoring

All respondents identified mentoring as important for both themselves and other women.

> *I think without actually having sponsors or mentors I would not have been where I am.*

Mentors gave access to networks and professional contacts, to those who could help in writing and obtaining research grants, to facilitators in the completion of Ph.D.'s and to those who could provide employment opportunities and help in making strategic career moves:

> *I had a very supportive, lecturer in my third year who really encouraged me to go on....I remember when I came out of my final third year exam, he was at the door and he grabbed me by the arm, and said, because he had already marked the first papers and this was the last paper, he grabbed me and said 'you have to go on to honours'. I said 'what's honours?'.*

* * * * * * * *

But in a quiet sort of way he was a big influence in helping me make job decisions, helping me get career advancement and he would come to me for example, and say, 'I am worried about the way you are publishing, why are you putting original work in this type of book of readings?' And I would say, 'oh well, I put it there because they asked me'. He said 'that is not a good reason. You ought to put it in a refereed journal, and this is the type of journal'.

Mentoring was also important in developing self-confidence.

It was the national exposure, I think, which puts you, so to speak, on the national market. So they were important milestones and they came about through superiors believing in you and facilitating that access.

The mentors were invariably male in significant positions of power within their institution. (This is not surprising given the predominance of men in these positions.)

I have had a whole stack of mentors throughout my career. Almost all of them have been men because there haven't been very many senior women to be a sponsor. That is absolutely essential and helpful in opening doors and legitimating you and introducing you to people.

* * * * * * * *

In relation to particular work environments, all of my mentors have been men. Which I mean I suppose it is not surprising. I have also had some powerful opponents who have been senior to me who were men.

One of the respondents argued that a better word to describe this process of mentoring was in fact *patronage*.

So I think there is a real problem in women getting patrons and I very firmly believe that the words 'mentor' and 'sponsor' really misrepresent what is required and what goes on because that is a form of patronage and I think we need to be much more up-front about what it is, because that is what men do.

She argued further that patronage is ingrained in university life, beginning in first year and is especially important in honours and postgraduate years because, for instance, choice of these patrons affects scholarship and employment prospects. She says, in fact, that male patronage is an important element in *male structural procreations* which parallel procreation in the family. The *man bears an*

intellectual descendent and hence the reproduction of cultural knowledge is sexualised and masculinised (Luke & Gore, 1992).

Numbers of theorists (Cass et al, 1983; Stiver, Lie & O'Leary, 1990; Poiner, 1991; Davies, 1993 among others) have taken up the problematic of the mentor and the mentored and the differential power relationships that exist, and found, in various ways, the term patronage more appropriate because it underlines the fundamentally patriarchal organisation characteristic of universities.

Gender and Power

It is important to point out that what emerged from the discussions was that the relationship between gender and power was not uniform across Australian universities. There were differences in representation, culture and degrees of misogyny between universities and even between departments within universities.

> *I come up against prejudice which is sometimes really quite funny and sometimes a bit serious. Really very undermining...but I have come up against real prejudice and, in a few cases, I would say really hostile malevolent misogyny. Really persistent misogyny.*

The most crucial factor in the degree of gender based difficulty was whether or not a Vice-Chancellor supported women and other issues of equity and social justice. It would seem that, unless universities have Vice-Chancellors, and other powerful males, with a commitment to equity and gender equity in particular, legislation will be applied selectively and the bands of *elderly male misogynists* will revert to notions of merit or expertise in order to legitimate the continuation of discrimination defined by the way they are connected to knowledge.

Paradoxically a number of women saw that it was easier for senior women to work in an institution where there was a male Vice-Chancellor supporting women and other issues of equity than it was where there was a female Vice-Chancellor. It is the male who legitimates the support for women and other equity initiatives; such initiatives are too easy to see as *feminist* when espoused by women (see Connell, 1995).

> *...having a very powerful male Vice-Chancellor who is very supportive..... Basically the male legitimates it. It was almost impossible at the University of (....) for anyone to be opposed to equity initiatives with regard to women.*

Perhaps this is not surprising.

> *When women teach about 'gender issues', students dismiss them in course evaluations by accusing them of 'putting in too much of her own opinion', of being 'too subjective' yet when our pro-feminist male colleagues give lectures on gender, their objectivity and authority on the subject go unchallenged (Heald, 1991; Kramer & Martin, 1988 in Luke & Gore, 1992).*

All the women saw that they had personal and positional power balanced variously but that, to a degree, each was diminished because of her gender.

> *I can say that since (....) (supportive male V-C) arrived, that the behaviour change in the university has been palpable. So I think I have much more positional and personal power than I had a year ago.*

* * * * * * * * *

> *I don't think I have as much power as the males do in the same position.*

One woman commented that her positional power was constantly being tested by opposition from males who felt threatened by changes to structures and procedures she had chosen to implement.

> *Now anyone making change, of course has opposition, but I think it has been targeted at me more by the group of males who have been alienated by this because they could lead comfortable lives, thank you, and I have questioned their comfort. It's been more targeted at me than it would have been at a man making those cultural changes.*

Such a response clearly demonstrates that those who have been in power,

> *want to retain the power inherent in defining what is valuable, good and proper. Different values and behaviours can simply be defined as deficient, devalued, and wrong when they are displayed by people who appear to pose threats to those in control. Dominance is maintained, and the actions of the people are seen as virtues and valued actions* (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988: 136 in Blackmore, 1992b: 19).

In essence, the women argued that there was a congruence between personal and positional power for men but such was not the case for women. Women have to win and consolidate personal power, they are not given it.

> *In the universities, positions are given a level of power, but I don't think women are given power. It's quite an interesting thing. Deputy Vice-*

Chancellors have a positional power which they are given and which they have to lose by doing the wrong thing.

Another respondent argued that personal power for women comes from convincing and negotiating, not from autocracy. Another argued that positional power was limited where there was little control over financial resources.

You always have power when you have money...

She felt she had personal power based on her authority as a person and that this, combined with her position, gave the illusion of positional power that then consolidated her personal power.

So what I am saying is senior academics like my kind, they do have positional power and you always run the risk of either consolidating that or losing it by your actions. However, my own view is, that in any position men have personal power which they then have to lose, so there is a congruence between the positional and personal power for men. But my view is that women have to gain personal power, they have to win it, they are never given it. So there is no congruence for women between the positional and personal power.

Women in positions of power are judged simultaneously by two measures. Firstly, on whether they are a strong manager or academic leader and, secondly, on whether they are an empathetic woman who takes on women's issues. Their empathy is watched carefully by men to see that they are not disadvantaged and by women some of whom have *expectations of one another's performance in the workplace* [which] *is unrealistically high* (Stiver, Lie & O'Leary, 1990: 69).

Gender as an Issue in Achievement

None of the women identified positive discrimination based on gender as a factor contributing to their present appointment. They had reached their present position almost despite being female.

When I was appointed, there were the most extraordinary rumours about, 'well just how did she get promoted?' It became so gross that we had an historian write the official history and we didn't know whether to laugh or cry when we read it. But we found that he had actually addressed the issue of how did she get appointed and was it true that (....) played this very interventionist role to get her appointed, even though it wasn't true, and he ends up saying, that examination of the

records suggests nothing other than a perfectly normal selection process. And I thought well, could you imagine the subject being raised in history if there had been a male Vice-Chancellor. It is inconceivable isn't it?

* * * * * * * *

(....) playing the role, that was the most modest of all the rumours that got circulated. But if I had slept with all the people I was supposed to have slept with, I would have been exhausted by the time I got to the interview.

All of the woman saw the need for women to achieve more in order to make up for their lack of accessibility to male networks of patronage and privilege.

Not in a positive sense, no. In a negative sense. I think the fact that more is expected of you as a woman. That you are more targeted. Men can do things that women can't do. If I were to have liaisons or any of the things I find some of my male colleagues can do, it would be the end. It is a lonely life and there is no choice and they are single women in these jobs simply because that's the only way in this present generation that seems to be acceptable.

It was necessary for them to be more efficient, more clever and more conscientious - the assumption being that *men can do a job, women have to prove it.* Wieneke sees that there is an unwritten rule that *women have to demonstrate that they can do a job* [before they are appointed] *whereas men need only demonstrate that they are likely to be able to do the job* (Wieneke, 1991: 49).

There was general agreement that women are more conspicuous, targeted and more constrained personally than their male counterparts. While they argued that there were some advantages in being conspicuous, and in being a woman espousing equity principles,

...but by the same token, because you are watched very carefully, well, you can also have quite a big effect....

each of them agreed that her conspicuousness gave no chance to make mistakes or to be seen to be weak.

If you are a woman and you are a woman of my age and in the circumstances in which I have worked, you are very obvious. I mean, there aren't any other women around so it is terribly obvious. That's a plus at one level. People notice you. The minus is of course whenever

> *you make even the slightest mistake it's on the front page of 'The Australian'.*

All identified covert discrimination encoded in language and practice and subtle differences involving who was listened to and who interrupted during meetings.

> *Its been about how you are listened to and who interrupts you and so on.*

Some suggested that men were seen as strong leaders when they asserted themselves while women are denigrated as *bossy*. One of the respondents found she could be relegated to the status of a *bloody wife* when matters became awkward.

> *The previous Vice-Chancellor, when I was having an argument with him about something to do with the university, said to me "you sound like bloody (....)" which is his wife. Now as a senior manager, how do you deal with that? There is nothing you can do about that. You sound like my bloody wife. You have actually been relegated into some kind of strange box.*

Others experienced bullying and rudeness.

> *You have got to be able to cope with pressures and you've got to be able to cope with people not only disagreeing with you, but attacking you and sometimes attacking you personally. That is actually very hard to cope with, I think, for men and women. But I think for many women it really comes as a shock.....I certainly have experienced that as a great shock myself when people have tried to bully me. And I think they would not have bullied me if I had been a man. I think they were trying to crack me. And I must say the first time it happened to me I very nearly burst into tears. And I thought if I do that, I will have lost.*

Unfortunately, most of the comments made in this section are sadly indicative of the mobilisation of bias (Connell, 1987) against women who aspire to positions of leadership and management. They are consistently marked as *other* or are positioned as potentially weak. In constructing the women as *weak*, she becomes more easily controlled in so far as the discourses of *powerful male, weak women* are marshalled to reinforce the differential power circulating in both social practice and discourse around men and women.

Personalisation of Criticism

All of the women believed that attacks upon them were nastier and more personalised both from within their institutions and from the media, than such attacks might have been on their male counterparts.

> *For example, (....), my husband and I, for about two months, twenty five years ago, ran a pub.... Now would you believe that the city newspaper described me as a barmaid at the (....) pub as an applicant for the job of (....).*

* * * * * * * *

> *I had only been at the Uni. five minutes and (....)* (naming a well known Australian journalist) *published an article on (....) attacking (....) University where "loony feminists were promoting loony feminists". He made the most extraordinary allegations about how we were promoting, nine, I think he said, women sociologists to associate professors just because they were women. Well we just didn't have nine sociologists to be appointed as associate professors and certainly we hadn't done this. It was total garbage. But very, very anti-women....and I just got in the way. Yet another woman he could label as a 'loony feminist'. It was amazing stuff.*

A number identified crudity and innuendo as features of the attack they experienced.

> *R: I wouldn't encourage women to do it. I just think that the personal costs are so huge. I get an enormous amount of criticism. There is a real tirade running in the (....) press at the moment against me which is really vindictive and it wouldn't happen if I were a man.*
>
> *I: You think that is entirely gender based?*
>
> *R: I'm sure, well, I'm quite sure that it wouldn't be dealt with with the same innuendoes and level of crudity that it has been dealt with if I were a man.*

When all the Vice-Chancellors' salaries were increased in 1993, the only Vice-Chancellors publicly targeted were the two women:

> *....when all of our salaries went up and the only people who got targeted were (....) and myself. Not even the other men in the city got any targeting for being on the same salaries. There was a sort of a feeling that women should not be paid as much as men. Or that they don't deserve it or something whereas in actual fact I think our costs are quite high because we don't have any home support. ...people don't realise, in some ways the stress and the loneliness of women at the top.*

It was almost as if women should not be allowed to earn as much as men. Instructively, when the University of Technology Sydney set aside $2 million for their Vice-Chancellor's residence, the press merely referred to him as being in a *scrape (Sydney Morning Herald, April 1995 Trials of the University Bosses, p. 29).*

All saw that their clothes, appearance and behaviour were matters of constant comment.

> *People comment on that. They wouldn't comment about men. You know how they comment on clothing, they comment on everything you look like which they don't do with men. A man has got a suit on and might be handsome or whatever. They aren't taken apart the same way as women are, and women are by both men and women.*

Because male power is seen to be natural and hence unmarked; women in power are seen as trying to be something they *naturally* are not. Perhaps this accounts for the way the media in particular seems to wait for the appearance of *chinks in their armour* and then publicises the chinks widely.

This personalised targeting both inside and outside institutions was identified as a factor discouraging the aspirations of other women.

> *It doesn't, for example, give me any confidence should I wish to be a female Vice-Chancellor. Discouraging in that sense. You think, would I want to be up there, being the target for all that stuff? That is quite a serious comment. Watching what has happened to (....), as well as a number of other women in other circumstances, has definitely put me off thinking that I necessarily want to climb any further up the ladder, should an opportunity arise. So that is the impact that I think is probably worst.*

It is evident from this section that women are made *object* in order to diminish and maybe even deny their power and status. So too, is it evident that the women's behaviour is pathologised; for example, one is described as a *loony feminist.* As Ramsay points out (see page 5 of this paper) *such personalised comments are attempts to make women the problem because of their inadequacy in the context of senior management rather than men's behaviour towards us.* Whilst we recognise that organisations like universities are certainly contested cultural sites where certain cultures are hegomonic and others are subordinate, it is obvious in the statements from one of the respondents that she would not be applying for the most senior positions, that challenging and disrupting prevailing discourses and social practices comes at a price, both personally and professionally.

All the women identified varying degrees of isolation as a consequence of their position.

> *But the burden actually of not being able to talk about work issues with anyone because you are either seen as disloyal or it's inappropriate when you are talking to people who are not in the same position as you. That is actually quite a heavy burden, and it would be enormously helpful to have colleagues at the same level where you actually say to each other, let's talk about these things in confidence and nothing will go out of these walls.*

The degree of the isolation was dependent upon whether there were other senior women colleagues, the culture of the particular institution, largely determined by senior men, and the existence of supportive networks, both within and external to the institution.

> *Yes, I do feel isolated and the way I handle it is I get support. As I was saying, my senior management team is the same as the family and I can rely on several of them for very warm support, virtually put my life in their hands, and, there are some women staff, I feel absolutely the same about, especially my personal staff....*

Many writers have pointed to the need for women to develop networks to provide both professional and personal support (Stiver & O'Leary, 1990; Wills, 1988; Wieneke, 1991; Randell, 1994). However, Mitchell's (1987) study also showed the importance of integration into male networks because there were so few women colleagues and to avoid being labelled *feminist* if participation was only in women's networks. Further, some women were self-conscious about associating with other women because of the derogatory responses from male colleagues towards women's networks (in Stiver, Lie & O'Leary, 1990).

Whilst some of the criticisms about the implementation of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation is reasonable, Randell's comments are salutory in alleviating some of the feelings of isolation experienced by women in senior management positions. She argues that increasing the number of women in decision-making roles is not only an end in itself, but a means of achieving real social justice for all women, and for women and men (Randell, 1994: 26). She cites Scutt's (1990) proposition that if management were to comprise equal numbers of women and men then this would change the culture of the workplace at all levels, which she sees as necessary to *combat the notion that issues of social justice are irreconcilable with other priorities such as efficiency* (Randell, 1994: 26). Changing the numbers,

changing the culture, providing more access to other women in similar positions means that senior women will not be so conspicuous and hence isolated.

Management Styles

None of the women initially identified the management style at her institution as particularly associated with either gender and most found it difficult to classify styles by gender.

> *I am a bit worried about my answers on management style because I suspect it is not quite the answer you wanted but I don't think I can identify - I mean I don't know in a sense how I could say we have a male or female management style. We have a style of management that seems to suit the kind of people, and I am talking about the senior managers here at present.*

* * * * * * * *

> *But a very realistic down to earth one and one that is well talked out about before it is implemented so it doesn't come across as excessively concerned with power.*

* * * * * * * *

> *I'm not sure that we have got one. Its a very, I would nearly call it a fairly casual management style.*

However, during the course of the interviews some did make distinctions between what they saw as male and female styles of leadership.

> *Somebody once told me here at the University that the problem with me was that I was remorselessly proactive. I thought it was a huge compliment. He meant it as a massive insult, and I think that is partly the management style of the institution, or at least of the senior management, that is, that we never see ourselves as being in a position to stop change. Now actually, I think that suits women quite well.*

One of the women suggested women's styles tended to be more consensual and the other women did support this view.

> *The style, however, is quite consultative, I think, and that is something I associate more with women than with men.*

The Vice-Chancellors stressed that leadership involved team work not autocratic control.

> *Part of it may be female, part of it may be my very strong, I guess, ethical background. But, I actually believe that leadership is about teams. I knew (from playing sport)...that it was about everybody being able to get the ball there. I think that is exactly what leadership in the university is about. I do not ever make autocratic pronouncements about anything. I have a very strong team of people. I think most of the initiative and empowerment must come at that local level. Clearly, the best people in disciplines know more about the discipline and the sort of staffing and the sort of issues. My goal has been to set a vision for the university, to try and explain that vision and to ask people how they match into that vision. And then to try and set up procedures, codes of conduct if you like, guidelines that ensure the proper processes take place which are about quality, about opportunities, about equity, fairness, all those kinds of things.*

* * * * * * * *

> *I am a very inclusive manager and share information and very much work on everybody having a right to know everything, and rather than a need to know or rationing out information, very consultative and I think I am very caring of that team... We need to support each other and help each other and not score points off each other, or look for each other's vulnerable positions, and I dislike divisive behaviour. I hate it when somebody is being competitive and divisive.*

Many of the respondents said that women were concerned with processes whilst men were concerned with the establishment of structures. Women talk to communicate and establish relationships while men talk primarily to establish hierarchy. Interestingly, one of the women argued that men often wanted rapid change without being prepared to take the time and effort to consult and negotiate.

> *However, when it comes to the rest of the institution, of course, with such a big complex multi-layered and devolved institution, I could name you 20 or 30 management styles around the place, in different schools for example, and some I have been very comfortable with, and some drive me absolutely bananas. I get very frustrated by some of the very conservative approaches in some areas, by the people who say, yes but, and can think of every reason under the sun to never do anything.*

Numbers of writers have described differences between the management styles of women and men (Stiver, Lie & O'Leary, 1990; Blackmore, 1992 & 1994; Eagly, Karau and Johnson, 1992; Blackmore and Kenway, 1993; Meyenn & Parker, 1994) and the women in this study indicate something of those differences. However, we

want to take up the issue Blackmore (1992a) raises in relation to the implications for women of the move in Australian universities, towards corporate managerialism, particularly since 1989 (see page 4 of this paper). Whilst accepting her argument that such an approach to governance, organisation and management of universities and its consequent emphasis on functions, hierarchy, structural efficiencies and measurable outcomes, increases the power at the top to control, monitor, evaluate and define the relative value of members' contributions to the institution and that *managerialism has a very masculinist flavour* (Bryson 1986, in Blackmore, 1992: 74), we suggest that there is evidence in this section of the paper that some women in senior management are interrupting both the discourse and practice of corporate managerialism in the pursuit of less constraining views of leadership.

Given the respondents' commitment to encouraging participation by other women in all facets of the life of academe, and their determination to uphold equal employment principles, then it may be that the fears of Blackmore and others (Yeatman, 1990 for example) that the positions of women will be further marginalised, may be ameliorated.

Dame Leonie's Comments

None of the women supported the views expressed by Dame Leonie Kramer or, for that matter, thought they should be taken seriously.

> *My reaction to her statement was of blind rage. My reaction to her statement was that it was a statement of the very worst kind in that it reinforced a whole lot of negative stereotypes about women and took absolutely no account of the vast amount of literature that there is on why women don't get on.*

* * * * * * * *

> *I think Leonie Kramer is a stupid woman and I concluded that a long time ago. So I never pay any attention to anything that she says. I know a number of women academics wrote letters and so on but I think it is giving it more credit than it deserves.*

The respondents were of the view that there was no evidence that women cope less well or talk more (see Spender, 1980).

I think that talk too much is an old myth. There any plenty of studies that show that if women even talked half as much as men, they are already classed as talking too much.

If women are perceived to be *complaining* it is perhaps because they are raising concerns which should be issues for the whole organisation. The women in the study argued that Kramer's comments took no account of the structural barriers to women's progress and reinforced negative stereotypes of women.

I: *How did you react to Leonie Kramer's comments last year?*
R: *My feeling is that she has probably been lucky.*
I: *You're very generous.*
R: *Well, her experience must have been very different from mine. I didn't have...maybe one could say she had a silver spoon and she had the husband with money behind her. She was able to go overseas quite early, she was fortunate and most of us had a grind, we came up on scholarships and had to work our way through. So never blame women for dropping out because I think the burden is colossal.*

Elitist Kramer assumed that her particular privileged socio-economic position was shared by all women and her comments reinforced the notion of objectively evaluated *merit* which in fact serves to justify male privilege.

I: *So my reaction to the debate surrounding Leonie Kramer's comments on female academics was that I don't think that she had changed very much and its fine to be elitist and privileged and financially viable but I don't think it has anything to do with reality. I was glad people took her on. I thought that was important. Obviously, I think her comments are irrelevant.*
R: *But they do have an impact because of who she is.*
I: *Because they reinforce the stereotypes of the males who want to say that they have always been fair.*

The only positive aspect that any of the women could see was that it raised again the debate in the general community about the structural barriers experienced by women in the university system. Sadly though, Professor Kramer's views also raised again accusations of women as *Queen Bees*, that is, women who have achieved success, are anti-feminist and reluctant to support other women (Stiver, Lie & O'Leary, 1990: 65).

RECIPES FOR OVERCOMING LIMPNESS....SOME CONCLUSIONS

All the women were committed to the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity and in many cases had set about ensuring that proper procedures for the appointment and promotion of staff and for the granting of tenure were understood and implemented. Indeed, one of them argued that *what we have (at present) is affirmative action for males and we have got to get equal opportunity;* a view which has brought her vociferous criticism. As Bacchi points out initiatives to change appointment procedures to give women a better chance, are seen as discriminatory and leading to less than meritorious appointments (Bacchi, 1993: 38). Ramsay writes:

> *You can only argue that equity programs reduce quality if you think ability is unequally distributed across the population on the basis of gender, race and class* (Ramsay, 1993: 11).

One of the women said that arguing publicly and unashamedly for Equal Employment Opportunity principles was starting to pay real dividends: as she became increasingly secure in her position it was more difficult for Equal Employment Opportunity considerations to be ignored:

> *I think the fact that I was a woman, and indeed a woman espousing and making fairly strong arguments about equal opportunity in the broader context has, in a way, been an advantage. I mean it has been very difficult for people to ignore me now. As I said, there is a downside of that. They might not be able to overlook you but they might be able to dig a big pit for you to fall into.*

The following statement also illustrates the determined and consistent commitment these women exhibited to ensuring that Equal Employment Opportunity practices were followed.

> *I think there is a sense in which, 'mate we wouldn't have been pushed along this* (path) *if we hadn't had a woman and now she is getting all these women in and it's going to be worse'. Because I ask questions. The last two appointments of professors, I have said, 'why don't you want to put her on the shortlist?' A whole lot of things come out and I say 'they are not relevant questions'. 'You haven't raised those about the men.' Its the usual stuff well, 'would a husband move, is she married?' 'Why don't you ask these about the guys?' 'Or what will she do about her children?' 'Parenting is about parenting, its not about mothering' I keep saying. A whole lot of these hidden things which I*

have actually blocked and forced and I know that that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been there.

It is hard to reconcile such obvious courage and persistence with anything that could be described as limp! Nor could any of the women be accused of wilting under pressure. Describing a disagreement with her maleVice-Chancellor on an issue of process, one of the women said:

I crossed him on a Chair committee the other day and he is cross with me. I mean he will get over it. I didn't vote for the candidate he thought we should have and I made a bit of a fuss about it for a number of reasons to do with process.

All were prepared to tackle the tough issues and gave examples of how they were prepared to make difficult and unpopular decisions. Notwithstanding the ambiguities inherent in the Equal Employment Opportunity principles, it is important to recognise the way the women in this study have used the principles in the interests of equity and social justice and to challenge the unexamined and taken for granted practices which have worked against the employment and promotion of women in Australian universities. They have found creative ways to play out agendas in environments which are uncomfortable and constraining. The disruptions they have caused to discourse and practice have often rendered them conspicuous and vulnerable and hence, easier to control by those who would oppose them. Their practices of insisting on due process and transparent protocols have been not only ends in themselves, but demonstration of educational programs with the potential to change the culture of their institutions.

All the women exhibited a very clear sense of purpose and were resolute in their determination to bring about changes in their institution through clearly articulated policies and directions. One of the Vice-Chancellors explained that the best way to achieve change is to work

on the basis that everything has to be done according to well articulated, clear cut consistent principles and these must be applied and transparent in a defensible way and that one is accountable for them...

Whilst another said

I have tried to have a clear educational change agenda, getting people on side, trying to get them to see why we are doing things, what it means for them, how they benefit the students...

When discussing the strategies they used for dealing with difficult situations, one said:

> *...This has got to stop...I did say, and this is probably a female thing, I will have these conferences with you and try and conciliate and try conflict resolution and work it through with you...that might be a more female style, it certainly has become stereotyped as such.*

Randell would speculate that the previous two statements from a Vice-Chancellor and a Deputy Vice-Chancellor publicise some of the advantages of women's managerial style; that is, it is more consultative, co-operative and committed to acknowledging people's concerns. *Their socialisation encourages a preference for attachment and connectedness as well as individualisation and self enhancement* (Randell, 1994: 21).

Unlike Ferguson who, argues that bureaucracies and feminist practices are antithetical (Ferguson, 1985 in Blackmore, 1992b) we would want to sound a cautionary and, indeed, an optimistic note. That women like those in our study have achieved positions of senior management is to be celebrated: their management practices offer some resistance to the traditional masculinist culture of senior echelons of universities and these practices are in the best interests of productive collegial relations.

The sense of the privilege of universities and their role in a democratic society, supported by productive collegial relations, was clearly enunciated by one of the women:

> *What I realised was the enormous freedom our kind of society has given us and it made me even more determined to fight for the right of free intellectuality, for open universities which have no fear or favour of government, which can speak out and can really take a leading role in this part of the world, because I think Australia can do that. We have got so many advantages. It always saddens me when there are these pressures to try and clamp down and stop that kind of thing and it also saddens me when, under the guise of freedom of speech, you do get staff who are actually quite biased, and prejudiced and narrow-minded.*

Such a vision expressed so passionately is scarcely the hallmark of limpness. To the contrary it underlines the sense of agency so often demonstrated by these senior women in challenging accepted discourses; in this case, the discourse of universities as businesses.

In different ways, the women had devised strategies for interactions with their male colleagues. As one said, she had

> *...a kind of neutral way of interacting. I mean I don't flirt. I try quite hard not to and I certainly try not to be their Mum...always focussed on the professional...I think generally that most of the men that I had dealt with had no idea how to deal with a woman, and at that level, they are relieved when I in fact set the tone...the reality is that we have to understand where they are coming from as well as hold our positions...they never really have to understand where we are coming from so, in a sense, I am living in two cultures all the time.*

It is the women who are positioned as having to accommodate male behaviours, to make the *adjustments*. But in making explicit that adjustment, male behaviour is rendered less invisible and consequently there for challenge.

In their various, individual and highly successful ways, the seven women bestriding senior management positions in Australian universities are *caught up in a system whose very nature makes success an extraordinary exception and other than a straight forward relatively predictable progression* (Davies, 1989: 21). However, *their extraordinary exception* and their visibility are challenges writ large on the manifestations of patriarchal hegemony still manifest in Australian universities. Despite the constraining environment, they have tested the possibilities of individual agency and its potential for interruption and change and sought creative ways to play out their agendas for socially just and inclusive practices.

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